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Curios and Relics

Clothing Accessories

Opera Glasses - Assassination

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection



OPERA OPTICS—Robert C. Hartt of Spring Valley holds opera glasses he believes Abraham Lincoln used the night of his assassination. Hartt

said glasses were retrieved by a great-great-grandfather who was in Ford Theater. Family has had glasses for four generations.

Theater Glasses Believed Lincoln's

A Spring Valley man owns a pair of opera glasses which he believes were used by Abraham Lincoln the night he was assassinated in Ford's Theater 102 years ago today.

Robert C. Hartt, 37, of 4018 N. Bonita St., said the glasses have been in his family four generations. They were handed down by a relative who, Hartt said, was in the theater in Washington the night Lincoln was shot.

Possession of the glasses came to light after Hartt wrote Rep. Lionel Van Deerlin, D-San Diego.

Glasses Retrieved

"My great-great-grandfather, Brevet Maj. James McCamly, helped carry Lincoln from the theater," Hartt wrote Van Deerlin. "The major retrieved the glasses when they fell from their case or the president's pocket."

Van Deerlin is attempting to authenticate the story.

He has been advised by Robert H. Bahmer, archivist of the United States, of records showing that McCamly "had command of the guard of honor in charge of the remains of the late President Abraham Lincoln."

Doubt Removed

The records, however, contained no information about the glasses or the whereabouts of McCamly the night of the assassination.

Hartt keeps the glasses in a safe deposit box in a Spring Valley bank, he said in an interview with the Evening Tribune.

"There's no doubt in my mind that Lincoln used the glasses that night," Hartt said. "My mother is the one who told me and I figure she would tell me the truth."

Value Unknown

Hartt said he has no idea of the value of the glasses.

He said he has had custody of the glasses since the death of his mother, Mrs. Sarah Morse Hartt, in Coronado in 1952.

The federal government is restoring Ford's Theater as it was the night of the assassination. Tentative plans call for opening it in late summer.

The historian working on the restoration, Dr. George J. Oleszewski, said it is known that Mrs. Mary Todd Lincoln, the President's wife, had opera glasses with her the night that Lincoln was shot by John Wilkes Booth.

"The Lincoln Museum has the opera glass case which Mrs. Lincoln dropped in the box the night of the assassination," he said. "But there are no glasses to go with the case."

Hartt told the Evening Tribune he would welcome an opportunity to try to fit his glasses into the case.

FROM THE OFFICE OF REP. LIONEL VAN DEERLIN
211 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515
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FOR RELEASE THURSDAY, MAY 2

WASHINGTON -- Rep. Lionel Van Deerlin, D-Calif., said Wednesday an intensive investigation has convinced him that opera glasses now owned by a constituent were used by President Abraham Lincoln the night he was assassinated at Ford's Theater.

The constituent, Robert C. Hartt, of Spring Valley, California, spent all of last week in Washington showing the glasses to various experts on Lincolniana. The glasses were acquired by Hartt's great-grandfather, James M. McCamly, a Union Army captain who served with the honor guard that escorted Lincoln's remains to their final resting place in Springfield, Ill.

Among others, Hartt met with Harold L. Peterson, chief curator of the National Park Service; Mrs. Josephine D. Allen, resident historian at the restored Ford's Theater; Mrs. Margaret B. Klapthor, associate curator at the Smithsonian Institution, and Rep. Fred Schwengel, R-Iowa, a leading Congressional authority on Lincoln.

Peterson matched the glasses with a case, found in the slain President's theater box, which the park service is preparing for display at the Ford's Museum. Hartt's glasses "precisely fit" the case, Peterson said, a fact that "leads naturally to the assumption that these glasses were indeed found" at the scene of the assassination.

Hartt, who borrowed \$300 to make the trip to Washington, received similar encouragement on his other appointments.

After having tests run at the Smithsonian, Mrs. Klapthor reported that the glasses were a type used by men during the latter half of the 19th century and that "the fineness of the grinding of...the lenses suggests they are of European manufacture." The case held by the park service is known to have come from Germany.

Mrs. Allen told Hartt that she personally would be happy to have the opera glasses in the Ford's collection.

Van Deerlin, who arranged Hartt's meetings here, said that in order to establish the authenticity of the glasses "beyond a shadow of a doubt," his constituent now must turn up a letter or other document linking them to Capt. McCamly.

So far this final proof is lacking. "But even without it," Van Deerlin said, "the circumstantial evidence gathered by Mr. Hartt so far may be strong enough to justify a private citizen's purchase of the glasses followed by a tax-deductible donation to Ford's or some other appropriate institution."

#

Abe's memorabilia logs expensive sale

The Daily Herald, Buffalo Grove, Ill.

Lincoln collectors did not have to wait for Feb. 12 to celebrate. They attended a spectacular auction of Lincoln material this fall.

Abraham Lincoln's stovepipe hat sold for \$10,000; the opera glasses he used at Ford's Theatre the night of his assassination brought \$24,000, and a copy of the 13th Amendment that confirmed Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, signed by Lincoln as well as 38 senators and 115 representatives, went for \$35,000 at the sale of the Crocker collection at Sotheby Parke Bernet in New York.

The check from Lincoln to his 8-year-old son "Master Tad" for one gold dollar cost the buyer 12,000 green paper ones. The price was a record for any presidential check, topping the

**Lita
Solis-
Cohen**



Antiques

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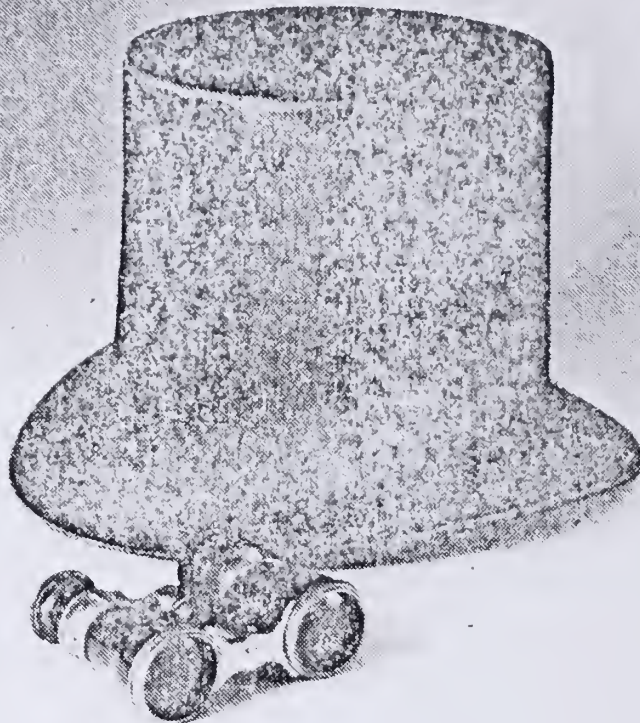
\$5,250 paid for a check of John F. Kennedy's at Sotheby Parke Bernet last season.

The receipt for \$6 that Lincoln paid to get a license to sell "spiritual liquors" at a tavern he operated in New Salem, Ill., was worth \$1,100 to a collector, and the sale contract for the house Lincoln purchased for \$750 in 1844 went for \$21,000. That's for the piece of paper, not the house.

In all, the collection of Lincolniana and American historical and financial letters and documents formed by the late Roy P. Crocker, president and chairman of the board of the Lincoln Savings and Loan Assn. in Los Angeles, brought a total of \$439,405.

MALCOLM FORBES, publisher of Forbes Magazine, spent \$116,000 on purchases that included the hat, opera glasses and the 13th Amendment. They are on display in the lobby of the Forbes building in New York City.

The value of any historical relic depends on its documentation, and the opera glasses have the most complete documentation of any Lincoln relic. On the night that Lincoln was shot, the opera glasses were picked up by James P. McCamly, captain of the City Guards in Washington, who also accompanied Lincoln's body to Springfield for the funeral. McCamly asked



LINCOLN'S BEAVERSKIN top hat sold for \$10,000 and the opera glasses he was using the night of the assassination brought \$24,000 at Sotheby Parke Bernet's recent sale of the Roy P. Crocker Collection of Lincoln and other historical documents.

Mrs. Lincoln if he could keep the glasses, and she agreed.

Lincoln was using the glasses when he was shot. They were out of their case. According to the affidavit sold with the lot, the case that originally held the glasses was found on the floor of the box by theater owner Clay Ford, and it is now in Ford's Theatre Museum in Washington.

In 1968, McCamly's daughter took the glasses to Ford's Theatre, and they fit perfectly into the case. She obtained a letter from the Park Service testifying to that fact.

The beaverskin hat has a less well documented provenance and, for that reason, brought a lower price. It certainly is a hat of that period and of a stovepipe shape associated with Lincoln.

THE MOST notorious Lincoln fake relic also was in the sale. It is a 10- by seven-inch stone carved with the legend "A. Lincoln Ann Rutledge were betrothed here, July 4, 1833."

At the turn of the century, an ingenious fellow "dug up" the stone in New Salem and got maximum newspaper

coverage for it. Oliver Barrett bought it and probably paid a considerable sum for it.

Sandburg illustrated it in *Lincoln Collector*, which was published in 1950. By the time of the Barrett sale of Lincolniana in 1952, it already had been discredited.

The myth that Ann Rutledge was Lincoln's true love had been proven to be the invention of William Herndon, Lincoln's secretary, who hated Mrs. Lincoln. When the stone was tested, it turned out to be composition. Nevertheless, it brought \$75.

At the Crocker sale, this fake went under the hammer at \$400 because it is considered a piece of folk art and because it has been in two important collections.

Comments and questions are welcome. Write to Lita Solis-Cohen, The Artists and Writers Syndicate, 1034 National Press Building, Washington, D.C. 20045. If you would like a reply, please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

The Washington Post

[Back to previous page](#)

Opera glasses believed to be Lincoln's to be auctioned

By Michael E. Ruane, Published: June 8

The story goes that the opera glasses were found in the middle of Tenth Street after the mortally wounded Abraham Lincoln was carried from Ford's Theatre to his deathbed in the Petersen House that April evening in 1865.

For generations, they were kept in the family of the Army officer who found them. In 1979, they sold at auction for \$22,000, a record for a Lincoln artifact. In 2002, they sold again, for \$424,000, another record.

Next week, the black and gold theater glasses Lincoln is believed to have used the night before his death are going back on the auction block, where experts think they could fetch as much as \$700,000.

The glasses are part of a June 17 Sotheby's auction in New York that will include pricey Civil War items such as a handwritten letter from Robert E. Lee discussing his resignation from the U.S. Army and a flag from the famous Confederate warship CSS Alabama.

The auction comes as the nation marks the sesquicentennial, or 150th anniversary, of the war, and interest in the subject is high.

"It's not unusual for us to handle six-figure items," said Selby Kiffer, the senior international specialist for books and manuscripts at the auction house. "But to have four or five of them all dealing with the Civil War is unusual."

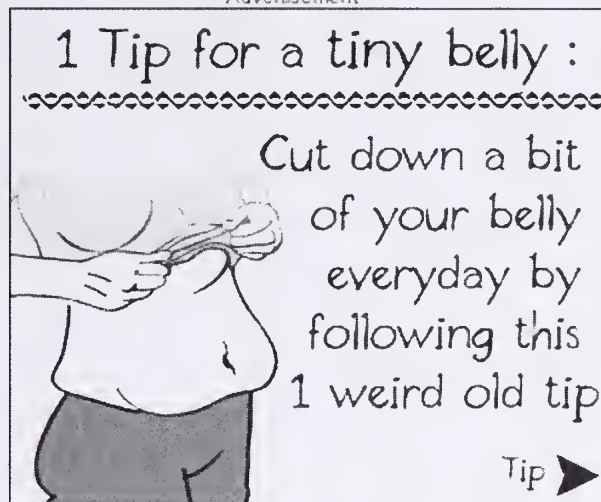
Lincoln's opera glasses are among the most iconic items associated with his April 14, 1865, assassination by actor John Wilkes Booth.

"To hold these artifacts — and, really, relic is not too strong a term to use for them — in your hands really transports you back to that moment in time," Kiffer said Wednesday.

Washington author and Lincoln scholar James Swanson said that we have plenty of relics connected to Lincoln the politician or the wartime president.

"What is great about the opera glasses is that they evoke another Lincoln: the literary man who loved

Advertisement



plays and the theatre and the relief they gave him from the burdens of office,” he said in an e-mail.

According to Sotheby's, the German-made opera glasses were found in the street by Capt. James M. McCamly, a veteran of the 70th New York Infantry Regiment who was serving as a Washington city guard the night of the assassination.

He rushed to the theater and helped carry Lincoln across Tenth Street to the Petersen boarding house, where the president died the next morning.

“As Lincoln was being transported, the opera glasses — perhaps still in Lincoln's hands, perhaps tangled in his clothing — fell to the street,” according to an auction catalogue note.

Sotheby's then cites an affidavit, drawn from family tradition, stating that McCamly “picked them up and put them in his pocket. He stayed with the body until it was taken to the White House at which time . . . he returned to his quarters and . . . discovered he had the glasses.”

The glasses stayed in his family for three generations, Sotheby's said.

In 1968, McCamly's great-grandson, researching the story, was told by the National Park Service that the glasses fit an opera glass case that had been “picked up in the Lincoln box” and was then in the Park Service's Ford's Theatre collection.

The Park Service confirmed Wednesday that it still has that black leather, red-satin-lined case.

But park ranger Gloria Swift, the former curator of the theater's Lincoln artifacts, said that case is thought to have belonged to Lincoln's wife, Mary Todd, whose opera glasses were also found in the box and are now in private hands.

She said she was skeptical of the McCamly story, noting that Lincoln had been examined by doctors in the theater and doubted that his opera glasses would still have been on his person as he was carried across the street.

“It doesn't mean it didn't happen,” she said. But “they could have been anyone's glasses.”

Kiffer, of Sotheby's, said: “With a piece of historical memorabilia, it's very difficult to arrive at 100 percent accuracy. But . . . to my mind, this is as close as one can get.”

Plus, he said, the glasses have been “tested twice by the collectors' market, which can be pretty severe, and both times come through with flying colors.”

In 1979, the glasses were sold by a collector who reportedly had bought them from McCamly's descendants. The presale estimate was up to \$4,000. They sold for five times that, to the late publisher Malcolm Forbes, Kiffer said.

In 2002, the glasses were sold again for a record-setting amount, Kiffer said.

In 2005, someone placed an ad in the New York Times stating that he had purchased the glasses from the Forbes collection and was offering them for sale for \$2.5 million.

Kiffer declined to identify the current seller but said he was the person who bought the glasses from Forbes.

In 2008, a Chicago newspaper profile identified Illinois lawyer and collector William Kaper Jr. as the owner of the glasses and the person who had bought them from Forbes. Kaper could not be reached Wednesday.

Kiffer said the glasses suggest one of American history's great "what if" moments.

"What if [Lincoln] had lived?" he said. "What if Booth had been stopped? How would Reconstruction have gone differently? How would the country have developed differently?"

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MailOnline News

Own the opera glasses Abraham Lincoln carried the night he was assassinated as Civil War memorabilia goes up for auction

By Mark Duell

Last updated at 9 31 PM on 9th June 2011

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It's a unique piece of history from the Civil War and the first ever assassination of a U.S. president.

Now the black and gold opera glasses believed to have been used by Abraham Lincoln on the night he was fatally shot are going up for auction in New York and are expected to sell for up to \$700,000.

Sotheby's auction house believes they were found by an Army officer after a fatally wounded Lincoln was carried from Ford's Theatre in Washington D.C. in April 1865 before he died the next day.



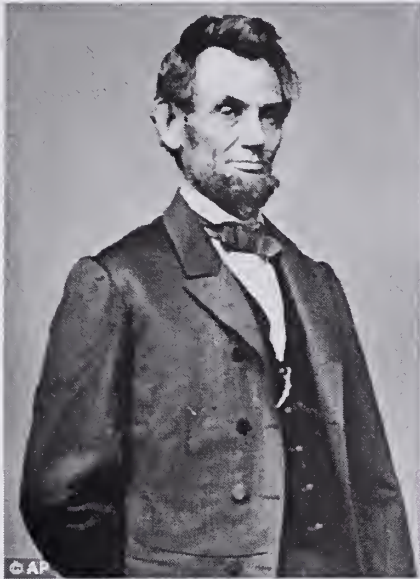
The black and gold opera glasses believed to have been used by Abraham Lincoln

The glasses were kept in the Army officer's family for years until they sold for \$22,000 in 1979 and in 2002 for \$424,000 - both of which were records for Lincoln artefacts, reported the Washington Post.

His German-made prized possession is part of an auction in New York next Friday that includes other Civil War items such as a flag from the Confederate warship CSS Alabama.

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the war so it is an excellent time for the items to go on sale as there has been much written about the conflict over the past few months.





On display: Sotheby's auction house believes the glasses were found by an Army officer after a fatally wounded Lincoln was carried from Ford's Theatre in Washington D.C. in April 1865 before he died the next day

It is 'unusual' for Sotheby's to be handling four or five six-figure items all on the subject of the Civil War at the same time, an auction house spokesman said.

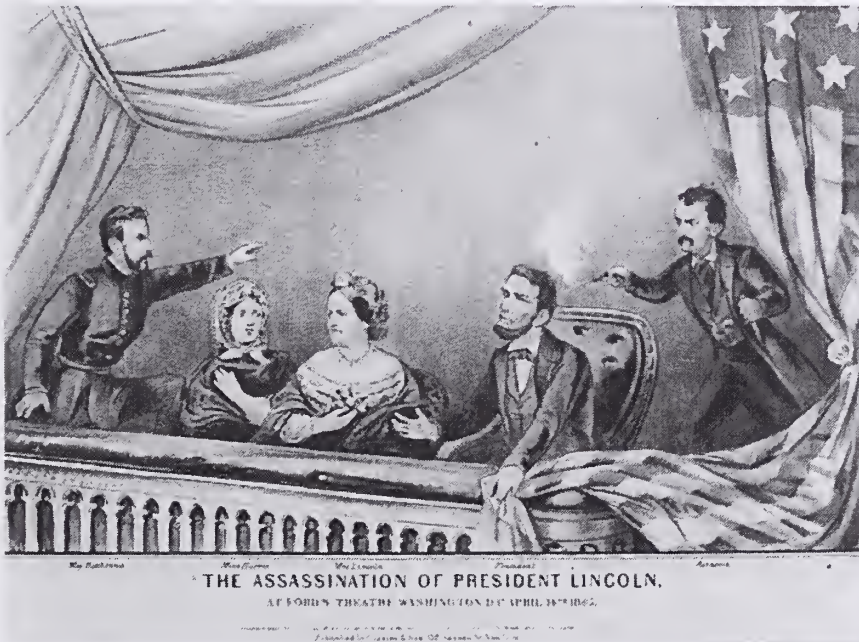
'To hold these artefacts - and, really, "relic" is not too strong a term to use for them - in your hands really transports you back to that moment in time'

Sotheby's auction house spokesman

'To hold these artefacts - and, really, "relic" is not too strong a term to use for them - in your hands really transports you back to that moment in time,' he told the Washington Post.

Lincoln was shot in the presidential box of Ford's Theatre by actor John Wilkes Booth, before he was examined by a doctor and carried across the street to Petersen's Boarding House where he died.

Captain James M. McCamly was serving as a city guard on the night Lincoln was shot and he found the glasses in the street after helping carry Lincoln across the street.



Assassination: Lincoln was shot in the presidential box of Ford's Theatre by actor John Wilkes Booth, before he was examined by a doctor and carried across the street to Petersen's Boarding House where he died

'As Lincoln was being transported, the opera glasses - perhaps still in Lincoln's hands, perhaps tangled in his clothing - fell to the street,' an auction catalogue note.

Gloria Swift, former curator of the Park Service's Ford's Theatre collection, doubts the story that the glasses would have been on Lincoln's person as he

crossed the street

But Sotheby's told the Washington Post that the glasses have been tested twice by the collectors' market - and have 'both times comes through with flying colours'.

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Bloomberg Businessweek

News From Bloomberg

Abraham Lincoln Glasses Could Fetch \$700,000 at Auction

By Katya Kazakina on April 23, 2012

The opera glasses held by Abraham Lincoln when he was assassinated 147 years ago are coming to the auction block next week.

Los Angeles-based auctioneer Nate D. Sanders estimated that they might fetch \$500,000 to \$700,000.

Lincoln was fatally shot at Ford's Theatre in Washington on April 14, 1865, while attending "Our American Cousin," a play starring Laura Keane. During the comedy, actor and Confederate sympathizer John Wilkes Booth entered Lincoln's box and shot him in the head.

The president's black enameled and gold glasses were picked up on the street by Captain James M. McCamly, a Washington City Guard who was helping transport Lincoln from the theater to the Petersen House, where the president died hours later.

"You can imagine all the commotion," said Laura Yntema, auction manager at Sanders. "They probably just fell down as he was being moved across the street to the hospital. They are very well documented. We have James McCamly's military records and a notarized letter from the McCamly's family as well."

Made by German company Gebruder Strausshof Optiker Berlin, the glasses remained in McCamly's family for three generations.

Magazine publisher Malcolm Forbes Sr. bought them in 1979. The current owner is anonymous. The glasses last came up for sale at Sotheby's (BID) (BID) in June 2011, with the estimate of \$500,000 to \$700,000. There were no takers.

Bids can be placed online or by phone at +1-310-440-2982 through April 30 at 5 p.m. PDT. The current bid is \$19,263, according to the auction house website.

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To contact the editor responsible for this story: Manuela Hoelterhoff at mhoelterhoff@bloomberg.net.

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